

A Short History of the Daijoin Temple

The original Daijoin Temple was built during the eleventh century and affiliated with Kofukuji Temple, the most important temple in Nara at the time. Daijoin burned to the ground in 1180, and again in 1451 during a peasant revolt. Zen'ami (1386–1482), a renowned medieval landscape designer, redesigned the garden, integrating ponds, bridges, plants and trees. The resulting garden was considered one of the most beautiful in Japan.

During the Meiji period (1868–1912), the garden was closed, and fell into ruin. By the 1920s, it was part of the Nara Hotel, and had been converted into tennis courts and a putting green. After World War II, the garden was recreated and a Heritage Center built to showcase the garden's history, along with scale models, maps, and important artifacts from the original temple. This historic garden is open to the public all year round.

A History of the Daijoin Garden

Daijoin was originally founded in 1087 as a subsidiary temple of nearby Kofukuji, the family temple of the powerful Fujiwara clan and one of the most important Buddhist temples in Nara. The original abbots of Daijoin were part of the Imperial family, or high-ranking court nobles, many of whom were Fujiwara clan members. The temple prospered during the second half of the Heian period (794–1195). It burned to the ground in 1180 and was subsequently rebuilt at its present location. In the turbulent Muromachi period (1336–1573), the temple and its gardens were destroyed by fire again, in the 1451 Tokusei Ikki peasant revolt.

Daijoin's twentieth high priest, Jinson (1430–1508), arranged for Zen'ami, one of Japan's most famous landscape designers, to restore the garden. Zen'ami redesigned it, integrating ponds, bridges, plants and trees. The resulting garden was considered one of the most beautiful in Japan. Many samurai nobles, including Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1436–1490), came to Daijoin not only to worship but also to appreciate the temple's famous grounds.

During the Meiji period (1868–1912), Buddhism was officially considered a dangerous foreign influence in Japan. Many Buddhist temples were closed and fell into disrepair, including Daijoin. By the 1920s, the grounds had become a part of the Nara Hotel, and the former temple garden featured tennis courts and a putting green. After World War II, a full restoration began. A heritage center was constructed at the entrance, to preserve and showcase the history of Daijoin through scale models,

maps, and artifacts from the original temple. After decades of research, excavation, and restoration, the site was finally reopened to the public in 2010. Visitors can stroll the grounds year round, enjoying the seasonal beauty of this historic garden, which features cherry blossoms in the spring, lush green scenery in summer, spectacular autumn foliage, and snowy landscapes in the winter months.